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November 20, 2024

Re: Bill 212 - Reducing Gridlock, Saving You Time Act, 2024 - Framework for bike lanes that require removal of a traffic lane

Greetings,

I am pleased to provide comments on behalf of the City of Mississauga regarding the Government of Ontario’s proposed Bill 212 “Reducing Gridlock, Saving You Time Act, 2024” and the proposed framework for bike lanes that require removal of a traffic lane. The City has a long history of productive collaboration with the Province generally and the Ministry of Transportation specifically, and we look forward to continuing in that spirit of collaboration.

The City has several concerns with the proposed framework for bike lanes that require removal of a traffic lane, and feel that there are many unanswered questions that will need to be addressed if we can work as effectively and efficiently as possible within a new approval and review process.

Cycling infrastructure design is multifaceted. Ontario Traffic Manual Book 18 is an excellent resource and outlines both the decision-making process for selecting an appropriate cycling facility type for any particular road, and provides detailed design guidance to maximize the safety of vulnerable road users. The City contributed to the development of OTM Book 18, along with representatives from several other Ontario municipalities, and the Manual was published by the Ministry of Transportation. The collaborative effort of creating the manual should be echoed by a collaborative approach to the framework proposed in the legislation.

Municipalities develop plans for roadway projects through several steps. The City’s Official Plan, Transportation Master Plan and Cycling Master Plan all provide progressive levels of direction regarding future infrastructure investments and cycling investments specifically. The amount of detail increases as plans progresses, however as early as the Transportation Master Plan phase, potential opportunities to expand the cycling network by repurposing existing uses on the roadway might be identified. Certainly, once a project moves forward to preliminary planning and design, alternative roadway designs begin to be reviewed. Municipal staff investigate several factors leading to a recommended road design. Factors that are typically considered prior to arriving at a recommendation include: traffic volumes; road safety; urban tree canopy impacts and opportunities; coordination opportunities with other scheduled works; cycling infrastructure design; and many others.

Ultimately, roadway design is more complex than simply weighing the impact to vehicular traffic throughput. Roads are places for the movement of people in a variety of modes, including in vehicles and on bicycles, but roads are also places where businesses and communities can thrive. It is the role of the municipality to balance the use of roads as both transportation corridors and the existence of roads as an integrated component of the communities they run through. Sidewalks, streetlighting, catchbasins, trees, front yards and patios are all components in how roads are designed and function.

At any point in this process, the potential for removing a lane of traffic to accommodate any of the other cross-section elements may be deemed feasible, including removal of a traffic lane in favour of a bicycle lane. However, there may be compelling reasons to modify a roadway cross-section for reasons other than installation of a bicycle lane. For example, changing an existing four lane roadway to a three lane roadway (thereby removing one lane of traffic) can have tangible road safety benefits, most notably a tendency towards slower operating speeds, or put another way, more appropriate operating speeds for a city street. Curtailing speeding on our roadways is a critical prerequisite to improving overall safety and reducing traffic injuries and fatalities on our roads. This is only one example where a specific benefit may be derived from a modification to the number of lanes on a roadway, but every project must weigh the various factors before arriving at a recommendation.

The City’s Cycling Master Plan is currently being updated, and the intent of the project had been to identify a five-year implementation plan alongside a list of “quick build” projects to realize shorter term significant improvements to cycling network connectivity in Mississauga. This effort is taking place against several intersecting backdrops. The Province has set housing targets that the City is working to achieve, along with other policy directions such as elimination of parking requirements in Major Transit Station Areas. The Province continues the development of critical public transportation infrastructure like the Hazel McCallion Line. The City has also recently launched a shared e-bike and e-scooter program, in line with the Provincial e-scooter pilot program which was recently extended until 2029, with over 100,000 trips taken since June 21st of this year. These intersecting policy initiatives compel the City to consider all alternatives to quickly expand transportation choice and provide increased safety for our growing population. Specifically, safe cycling infrastructure and cycling as a transportation option is required to ensure mobility for residents of Mississauga, and all reasonable alternatives must be permitted to be explored in an efficient and timely manner.

Therefore, the City would appreciate additional details and clarity from the Province as to the process and timing for initiating any review of projects that propose the installation of cycling infrastructure alongside the removal of a lane of traffic. Some details would include what data the Province would require for their review, the stage of project development for the submission to take place, thresholds for traffic impacts that the City might be provided in advance of submitting a review, and a “one-window” approach with the appropriate division at the Ministry. The City would further recommend that if such a review process is put in place, the Province provide a guaranteed turnaround time for reviews and decisions, so that the City can manage expectations with the public and stakeholders, and proactively plan project timelines to build in Provincial review when appropriate.

I am available to discuss the City’s recommendations further at your convenience.

Sincerely,



Matthew Sweet

Manager, Active Transportation